

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

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AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 24938

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CB, VN

SUBJECT: CAMBODIAN-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS

REF: BANGKOK 24710 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: AN APPARENT GROWING CLOSENESS BETWEEN CAMBODIA AND VIET-NAM MAY NOT BE ALL THAT IT APPEARS TO BE AT FIRST GLANCE, FOR PROBLEMS REMAIN BETWEEN THEM. CAMBODIANS MAY SIMPLY HAVE ADJUSTED TO THE NEED TO COOPERATE WITH THEIR STRONG NEIGHBOR AT SAMW TIME THAT THEY CONTINUE TO KEEP AT A CERTAIN DISTANCE. END SUMMARY.

1. FOR SOME TIME OBSERVERS OF THE CAMBODIAN SCENE HAVE BEEN NOTICING WITH INTEREST THE ATTENTION THE CAMBODIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE BEEN ACCORDING VIET-NAM. WHEREAS THE PRINCIPAL MENTION OF PEKING DURING THE PAST MONTH OR SO ON PHNOM PENH RADIO HAS CONCERNED THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S HARDNESS WHEN FACED WITH
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A DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE, IENG SARY'S STOPOVER THERE

AUGUST 8 EN ROUTE TO COLOMBO AND HE AUGUST 26 SIGNATURE OF SINO-CAMBODIAN AID AGREEMENT VIET-NAM HAS FIGURED PROMINETLY IN A SERIES OF ACTIVITIES WHICH HAVE BEEN WELL PUBLICIZED.

2. THESE INCLUDE THE VISIT OF A LARGE VIETNAMESE JOURNAL-LISTS' DELEGATION TO CAMBODIA IN MID-JULY. THEY MADE AN USUALLY EXTENSIVE TOUR OF THE COUNTRY AND WERE ACCORDED A LONG INTERVIEW BY PRIMIN POL POT, WHO PLACED CONSIDERABLE EMPHASIS ON THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE VISIT WAS RAPIDLY FOLLOWED BY THAT OF A VIETNAMESE CIVIL AVIATION TEAM WHICH IENG SARY RECEIVED AND WHICH NEGOTIATED IN PRINCIPLE THE OPENING OF AN AIR ROUTE BETWEEN HANOI AND PHNOM PENH. ALTHOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT TO FORESEE MUCH RRAFFIC FLOWING BETWEEN THOSE TWO POINTS, IT DOES GIVE THE CAMBODIANS ANOTHER OPENING TO THE WORLD BESIDES PEKING AND CONSITTUTES A SORT OF POLITICAL MILESTONE FOR THE VIET-NAMESE. (AMCIT MIKE MIELKE, WHO DEPARTED SAIGON AUGUST 1, OBSERVED A C-130 COMING FROM THE DIRECTION OF PHNOM PENH ON WHAT HE SPECULATED WAS A VIETNAMESE TEST FLIGHT OF THE NEW ROUTE.)

3. MORE RECENTLY A CAMBODIAN WOMEN'S DELEGATION CONCLUDED A VISIT TO BOTH PARTS OF VIET-NAM, AFTER SEEING THE WONDERS OF TIRANA AND PYONGYANG. MUCH OF THE CAMBODIAN LEADERSHIP TURNED OUT FOR AN SRV NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION IN PHNOM PENH, SENDING WARM MESSAGES AS WELL TO THEIR VIETNAMESE COUNTERPARTS. DURING AUGUST THE CAMBODIAN CHARGE IN HANOI AND HIS COLLEAGUES IN PYONGYANG AND PEKING ELEVATED TO THE RANK OF AMBASSADOR AND PRESENTED HIS CREDENTIALS.

4. BALANCING OFF THE GOOD PUBLIC TIES HOWEVER ARE THE LESS VISIBLE SMALL BUT FREQUENT PROBLEMS WHICH CONTINUE TO OCCUR ON THE BORDER PARTICULARLY ALONG THAT PART ADJOINING MONDOLKIRI PROVINCE IN CAMBODIA. THE CAMBODIANS SEEM TO TRY TO MINIMIZE THEM SO THAT THEY DO NOT ESCALATE TO OPEN FIGHTING BUT THE POTENTIAL FOR REAL CONFLICT IS THERE. IN ADDITION THERE ARE SIGNS THAT THE VIETNAMESE ARE SOMEWHAT ISOLATING THE CAMBODIAN EMBASSY IN HANOI AND COMPLAIN ABOUT THE SAME THING HAPPENING TO THE SRV EMBASSY IN PHNOM PEHN. THE VIETNAMESE CLAIM THAT THEY WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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UNABLE TO ROUSE ANYONE FROM THE CAMBODIAN EMBASSY FOR A THAI-HOSTED DINNER DURING FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHA'S AUGUST 3-6 VISIT TO HONOI SOUNDED SOMEWHAT SUSPICIOUS TO THAI EARS. THE JAPANESE SWITCHED THEIR POINT OF CONTACT WITH THE CAMBODIANS FROM HANOI BACK TO PEKING SOME TIME AGO WHEN THEY THOUGHT THEY DETECTED SIGNS THAT VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS DID NOT LOOK FOVORABLY UPON THEIR MEETINGS WITH THAT EMBASSY. RECENT VISITORS FROM HANOI REPORT THAT

PERSONNEL OF THE CAMBODIAN EMBASSY ARE DEROGATORY IN THEIR COMMENTS ABOUT VIET-NAM STATING THAT THE CAMBODIAN REVOLUTION IS THE TRUE ONE AND THAT THERE IS NO HUNGER IN CAMBODIA AS THERE IS IN VIET-NAM. A FINAL DIVISIVE FACTOR IS THE AGE OLD DISTRUST OF VIETNAMESE WITH WHICH VIRTUALLY ALL COMBODIANS ARE IMBUED.

5. ONLY OCCASIONALLY DOES ONE HEAR REPORTS FROM REFUGEES ABOUT ANY VIETNAMESE ADVISORS INSIDE CAMBODIA AND THERE MAY BE ONLY HEARSAY. WE HAVE HEARD FROM THREE DIFFERENT RECENT CAMBODIAN REFUGEES WHO DO NOT KNOW ONE ANOTHER THAT SOMW VIETNAMESE OFFICERS ARE SERVING AS ADVISORS IN A KC MILITARY PROGRAM IN BATAMBANG. IN TRUE, IT IS THE EXCEPTION TO THEIR GENERALLY CONSPICUOUS ABSENCE FROM THE COUNTRY. THERE IS ALSO A REPORT FROM TIME TO TIME THAT A FEW VIETNAMESE OFFICERS ARE WORKING WITH THAI COMMUNIST ELEMENTS BASED INSIDE CAMBODIA IN PREACH VIHEAR PROVINCE AND ELSEWHERE. IF ACCURATE SUCH CONTACT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED TO BE IN A DIFFERENT CATEGORY SINCE IT WOULD NOT BE WITH CAMBODIANS TO ANY GREAT EXTENT.

6. SOME WILL INTERPRET THE PUBLIC CONTACTS BETWEEN VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIANS AS INDICATIVE OF A SHIFT OF THE CAMBODIAN LEADERSHIP AWAY FROM TIES WITH THE PRC TO FAVORING THE VIETNAMESE. THE EMBASSY WONDERS HOWEVER, WHETHER THE EVIDENCE WHEN IT Q TALLIED UP SHOWS ANYTHING MORE THAN A REALIZATION THE PART OF THE CAMBODIAN LEADERS THAT IN THEIR COUNTRY'S RATHER WEAK STATE THEY MUST GET ALONG WITH THEIR POWERFUL EASTERN NEIGHBOR, RELATING AGREEABLY BUT KEEPING THEIR DISTANCE AT THE SAHE TIME. AS AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR DAVID WILSON NOTED, THE VIETNAMESE ALSO SEEM TO HAVE RECOGNIZED THAT THIS IS THE KIND OF RELATIONSHIP THEY ARE GOING TO HAVE WITH THE CAMBODIAN

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REGIME AND HAVE ACCOMMODATED THEMSELVES TO THAT STATE OF AFFAIRS (REFTEL). THE PRC IS NOT NECESSARILY DISPLACED IN SUCH A SITUATION ALTHOUGH IT IS ONE WHICH UNDOUBTEDLY KEEPS THE CHINESE ON THEIR TOES A GAME THE CAMBODIANS MAY SECRETLY LIKE TO PLAY. THE CAMBODIANS ARE OLD MASTERS AT AT THE BALANCING ACT; THIS REGIME, LIKE OTHERS BEFORE IT, IS SURELY TRYING MOST OF ALL TO KEEP CAMBODIA IN THE BEST PTSSIBLE POSITION.
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